

Sharon Rolenc, *Minnesota Public News Service*

ST. PAUL, Minn. - If some members of the new Congress have their way, the "on-air" lights could dim at thousands of public television and radio stations around the country. Currently, six bills propose to eliminate all federal funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which supports National Public Radio, the Public Broadcasting Service and other public media. Congress could vote on some of them as early as this week.

Congresswoman Betty McCollum (D-St. Paul) says she will fight what she considers irresponsible cuts to a national treasure.

"Public broadcasting is considered by the American public to be the second best use of taxpayers dollars. That's only outranked by defense spending, and defense spending is held harmless in all of the Republican and Tea Party cuts I've seen. Public broadcasting is something that taxpayers in this country see is of great value, so I'm going to be out there fighting to protect it."

Eliminating the Corporation for Public Broadcasting would mean a loss of more than \$14 million for nearly two dozen TV and radio stations across Minnesota. Nationally, public broadcasting funding amounts to a yearly cost of about \$1.35 per person in the United States.

Marianne Potter is the president and CEO of KSMQ-TV in Austin, Minn. She says the relatively small federal investment provides a critical resource in under-served communities throughout rural America.

"The Corporation for Public Broadcasting provides programs for children, documentaries that open up new worlds, non-commercialized news - and perhaps most importantly, access to the arts, theater and music to people no matter where they live, even if they don't have those opportunities right there within their community."

Potter says the proposed cuts would be especially tough for smaller radio and television stations, like her PBS affiliate, that provide local and regional programming.

"That federal support represents, for KSMQ, about 40 percent of our total operating budget. That amount would be almost impossible for us to make up in other sources."

Critics of public media say the system is no longer needed, because technology has made more programs available to more people.

However, Josh Stearns, a national advocate for media freedom and reform with Free Press Action Fund, sees the cuts as a threat to First Amendment free-speech rights. He says the public funding is essential at a time when newsroom consolidation is reducing the depth and variety of coverage.

"We need journalists who are going to be dedicated to that public service mission of journalism. Our public media is our media. It's a national resource, just like our national parks."

Information on funding of public media by state is available at [www.cpb.org](http://www.cpb.org).